

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 02936 01 OF 02 041341Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----117506 041351Z /50

P 041241Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1649
INFO AMEMBASSY CAPETOWN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS
/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0117
USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2936

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PCAT, UNSC, IS, XF
SUBJ: ISRAELI COMPLIANCE WITH SOUTH AFRICAN ARMS EMBARGO

REF: TEL AVIV 2704

1. WHEN ROY ATHERTON AND I MET WITH PRIME MINISTER
BEGIN THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 2, IN PRIVATE BEFORE THE
LARGER MEETING, BEGIN TOLD ME THAT THE CABINET SECURITY
COMMITTEE HAD REACHED A DECISION ON HOW TO HANDLE THE
SOUTH AFRICAN ARMS QUESTION. HE SAID THAT "WE WANT TO
SOLVE THE PROBLEM;" THAT WEIZMAN HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO
DISCUSS IT WITH THE APPROPRIATE STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS
DURING HIS VISIT NEXT WEEK; THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WAS
INSTRUCTED TO PREPARE A FORMAL NOTE TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE UN, AND THAT "WE WANT TO WORK OUT THE LANGUAGE TOGETHER
WITH YOU FOR THIS NOTE;" BUT THAT IT MAY TAKE "A FEW DAYS"
FOR THEM TO PREPARE A DRAFT. HE MADE CLEAR THAT THE MATTER
WAS NOW IN EZER WEIZMAN'S HANDS. HE DID NOT TELL ME WHAT DECISION
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HAD BEEN REACHED, BEYOND THESE CURIOUS PROCEDURAL STATEMENTS.

2. I WAS HARDLY SATISFIED WITH THIS RESPONSE AS YOU MAY
IMAGINE. HOWEVER, DAYAN JOINED US AT THIS POINT AND THE PRIME
MINISTER WAS CLEARLY ANXIOUS TO DISCUSS SADAT'S MESSAGE WITH
ATHERTON. I THEREFORE CHOSE TO PURSUE THIS MATTER FURTHER
WITH WEIZMAN RATHER THAN TRY TO FORCE CLARIFICATION FROM

BEGIN AT THAT MOMENT.

3. LATER IN THE DAY I MET PRIVATELY WITH WEIZMAN ON A NUMBER OF MATTERS. I ASKED HIM TO TRY TO EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT ACTUALLY HAD HAPPENED ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMS ISSUE. HE SHRUGGED WITH A SMILE AND SAID "THEY'VE DUMPED IT ALL ON ME." I SAID I WAS FRANKLY THOROUGHLY CONFUSED BY WHAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD TOLD ME. I DID NOT QUITE UNDERSTAND WHAT ROLE WEIZMAN WOULD HAVE IN THE MATTER, SINCE ALL THAT WAS REQUIRED WAS A FORMAL DIPLOMATIC MESSAGEFROM, PRESUMABLY, THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL STATING THAT ISRAEL WOULD ADHERE TO THE TERMS OF THE EMBARGO AS THEY WERE INTERPRETED BY EVERYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD. I DID NOT QUITE SEE WHAT THERE WAS TO NEGOTIATE OR DISCUSS DURING HIS VISIT IN WASHINGTON WITH OUR OFFICIALS. MOREOVER, MY IMPRESSION WAS THAT THE DRAFT NOTE WOULD NOT EVEN BE AVAILABLE TO WEIZMAN BEFORE HE LEFT FOR SUCH A DISCUSSION. I WENT OVER WITH HIM AGAIN THE TOTAL ISOLATION FACED BY ISRAEL ON THIS MATTER, AND URGED A CLEAR CUT DECISION RATHER THAN ANY EFFORT AT OBFUSCATION.

4. WEIZMAN RAISED AGAIN WITH ME THE QUESTION OF FRENCH ADHERENCE TO THE EMBARGO. HE SAID THE SOUTH AFRICANS HAD CONFIRMED TO THE ISRAELIS THAT PRIVATE FRENCH ARMS SUPPLIERS WERE CONTINUING TO SELL WEAPONS AND TO DELIVER THEM. I SAID THAT OBVIOUSLY I COULD NOT EXCLUDE EVASIONS OF THE EMBARGO AS A POSSIBILITY. BUT NONETHELESS THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT HAD FORMALLY AND OFFICIALLY CONFIDENTIAL

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ACCEPTED THE APPLICABILITY OF THE EMBARGO TO EXISTING CONTRACTS, AND HAD CANCELLED A SHIPMENT OF CERTAIN ITEMS WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN PAID FOR. THERE WAS NO WAY THAT WHATEVER EVASIONS MIGHT BE TAKING PLACE COULD BE USED BY THE ISRAELIS AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR UNIQUE FORMAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MEANING OF THE EMBARGO RESOLUTION. I STRESSED THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND ALL OTHER NATIONS AGREED WITH OUR INTERPRETATION THAT IT REQUIRED CANCELLATION OF DELIVERIES UNDER

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

-----117551 041355Z /50

P 041241Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1650

INFO AMEMBASSY CAPETOWN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY

USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2936

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

EXISTING CONTRACTS. WEIZMAN LOOKED AT ME WITH A SMILE AND ASKED, "ARE YOU TELLING ME WE SHOULD GIVE A FORMAL COMMITMENT AND THEN EVADE IT?" I REPLIED FORCEFULLY THAT I WAS SAYING THEY SHOULD GIVE A FORMAL COMMITMENT AND LIVE UP TO IT.

5. WEIZMAN, WHO WAS CLEARLY CONCERNED ABOUT MANY OTHER MATTERS AND UNENTHUSIASTIC IN THE FIRST PLACE ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED IN THIS AFFAIR, THEN SAID THAT HE WOULD INSIST THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HANDLE THE MATTER AND WOULD NOT TRY TO GET INTO IT IN WASHINGTON. (EXACTLY HOW THIS WILL SQUARE WITH WHAT BEGIN TOLD ME THE CABINET COMMITTEE HAD DECIDED IS UNCLEAR.)

6. COMMENT: THIS IS ALL UNSATISFACTORY; A MURKY RESULT OF OUR

DEMARCHE. I HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT THE ISRAELIS WANT TO CONTINUE TO STALL, AT LEAST UNTIL THEY HAVE DELIVERED THE MISSILE BOAT WHICH IS ALMOST READY FOR DELIVERY, ALTHOUGH THEY MAY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THEY HAVE TO COME IN TO LINE WITH EVERYONE ELSE FORMALLY AT SOME POINT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE TRANSPARENT EFFORT
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TO GET US TO HELP THEM CONSTRUCT THEIR CASE IN A DIPLOMATIC NOTE IS ONE WHICH OBVIOUSLY WE SHOULD HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH. I WILL MAKE THAT CLEAR TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, AND I TRUST THE DEPARTMENT WILL DO THE SAME SHOULD WEIZMAN RAISE IT IN WASHINGTON.

7. ALTHOUGH THIS OUTCOME IS AMBIGUOUS, ONE THING IS NOT. IT IS NOW TOTALLY CLEAR TO BEGIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES THAT THE U.S. WILL NOT RPT NOT SUPPORT ISRAEL IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL WHEN THE ARMS EMBARGO WATCHDOG COMMITTEE BEGINS TO ZERO IN ON THE ISRAELI POSITION.
LEWIS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET MEETINGS, ARMS EMBARGO, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TELAV02936
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780099-0570
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803105/aaaadllt.tel
Line Count: 169
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5e427bb8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 TEL AVIV 2704
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3113927
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ISRAELI COMPLIANCE WITH SOUTH AFRICAN ARMS EMBARGO
TAGS: PCAT, IS, XF, SF, UNSC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5e427bb8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014